



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Maldives

Population: 0.39 millions (#179 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 298 square km. Comprising nearly 1,200 coral islands clustered into twenty-six atolls, the Maldives are located in the Indian Ocean southwest of India. Two hundred islands are inhabited and an additional eighty have tourist resorts. Flat terrain dominated by white sand occupies most islands, and tropical weather occurs year round. Precipitation fluctuates throughout the year as the rainy season occurs from June to August, whereas the dry season lasts from November to March. Tsunamis and sea level rise are natural hazards. Environmental issues include inadequate freshwater supplies and coral reef bleaching. The Maldives are administratively divided into twenty-one administrative atolls.

Peoples

Maldivian: 67%

Other: 33%

Maldivians trace their ancestry to settlers from the southern Indian subcontinent. Migrant workers number approximately 110,000 and originate primarily from southwest Asia and India. There may be as many as 15,000-20,000 undocumented foreigner workers from South Asian countries.^[1]

Population: 392,709 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: -0.06% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 1.73 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 73.5 male, 78.3 female (2017)

Languages: Divehi [Maldavian] (99%), other (1%). Divehi is the official language and is related to Sinhalese. Divehi has multiple dialects, which are all mutually intelligible with the exception of the Malé dialect spoken in the national capital of Malé. English is commonly used in education.

Literacy: 99.3% (2015)

History

Settlers from southern India were likely the first inhabitants of the Maldives. During the fourth and fifth centuries BC, Buddhist Indo-European speaking settlers arrived from Sri Lanka. East African and Arab sailors arrived in the twelfth century AD and introduced Islam. An independent Islamic sultanate was established in 1153. Maldivians have maintained self-rule for much of their history. The Portuguese maintained a short rule of just fifteen years in the mid-sixteenth century that came to an end when Muhammad Thakurufar Al-Azam drove them out in 1573. Maldives became a British protectorate from 1887 to 1965 when independence was regained. In 1968, the sultanate was abolished, and a republic form of government was instituted. The Maldives have captured international attention in recent years due to their notorious distinction as the nation-state with the lowest high-point elevation of 2.4 meters, with the accompanying risk of displacement of people and property as sea levels rise due to global warming. In 1987, an abnormally large high tide washed over the islands and flooded much of Malé and several other islands. In addition to rising sea levels, past coral and sand mining have removed or deteriorated the effectiveness of coral reefs and other geographic features, making the islands more susceptible to erosion from the surrounding ocean.[\[2\]](#)

Culture

Islam has heavily influenced Maldivian culture for almost nine centuries, creating tight-knit communities and strong ethno-religious ties. Strict observance of Islam has historically reduced crime, but in recent years gang and illicit drug activity have begun to erode past stability and order.[\[3\]](#) Garudiya, a fish broth made from tuna,[\[4\]](#) is one of the basic and traditional foods. Fish is the primary staple of traditional diet. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are low. Polygamy is legal but not commonly practiced.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$19,200 (2017) [32.3% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.701

Corruption Index: 33 (2017)

Tourism drives the economy, generating 28% of the GDP. Import duties and tourism-related taxes account for over 90% of government tax revenue. Fishing constitutes the second largest sector of the economy. Many foods are imported as a result of limited arable land and a lack of labor. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami devastated many areas of the Maldives, but reconstruction efforts led to strong economic growth thereafter until the global financial crisis reduced demand for fish exports and tourism. Due to significant economic development, the Maldives report low unemployment (2.9% in 2017). Services employ 69.5% of the workforce and generate 81% of the GDP, whereas industry employs 22.8% of the workforce and generates 16% of the GDP. Major industries include tourism, fish processing, boat building, coconut processing, clothing, crafts, and coral and sand mining. Agriculture employs 7.7% of the workforce and generates 3% of the GDP. Coconuts, corn, sweet potatoes, and fish are common agricultural products. Thailand, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and India are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived as widespread, and allegations of government corruption have been made frequently. There are increasing concerns over the lack of public confidence in the electoral system.[\[5\]](#) Recent corruption concerns have particularly focused on the electoral process.[\[6\]](#)

Faiths

Muslim: 99%

Other: 1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Latter-day Saints – less than 10

Religion

Sunni Muslims account for virtually the entire Maldivian population. Most foreigners are Muslims. Some non-Muslims practice their religions in private.[\[7\]](#)

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index: 6th

The constitution declares Islam as the official state religion, and the law prevents citizens from following any other religion. Foreigners are not permitted to encourage citizens to practice other religions and can only practice their religious faith in private. The government and constitution stipulate that citizens must be Muslim, and non-Muslims cannot become citizens. Many aspects of government policy are based on Shari'a law. Religious freedom for non-Muslims is severely restricted. There is no legal framework to safeguard against the persecution and harassment of religious minorities. Government officials have iterated that the homogenous Muslim society of the Maldives is unique, and consequently, no other religious groups are permitted to operate among citizens in order to preserve local culture and religious traditions. Most Islamic holidays are recognized by the government. School curriculum requires students to study Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners cannot hold public meetings or proselyte. Societal abuses of religious freedom have primarily comprised death threats, harassment, stalking, and the cyberbullying of secularist bloggers.[\[8\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 40%

Male', Hulhumale', Hithadhoo, Fuvahmulah, Kulhudhuffushi, Villingili, Thinadhoo, Naifaru, Feydhoo, Gan.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregations.

None of the ten most populous urban areas have an LDS presence. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the national population resides in the ten largest cities and villages.

LDS History

Ecclesiastical responsibility for the Maldives was transferred from the Singapore Mission to the India Bengaluru Mission in 2007. As of 2018, there was no LDS presence and few or no Latter-day Saints residing in the country.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 10 (2018)

Any Latter-day Saints in the Maldives are foreigners temporarily living in the country. Most foreigners originate from nations with extremely small LDS populations, making the prospect of multiple Latter-day Saint foreigners in the Maldives unlikely.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 0 (2018)

There are no organized LDS congregations. The India Bengaluru Mission Branch services the Maldives.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: English.

There are no LDS scriptures in Divehi. The only known translation of LDS materials in Divehi is the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, which was published in 1991.

Humanitarian and Development Work

There had been no known LDS humanitarian or development work in the Maldives as of 2018.[\[9\]](#)

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

There are no realistic prospects of an LDS presence in the Maldives at present, as the constitution requires Maldivian citizens to be Muslims, and the government prohibits any proselytism. Laws are so strict that Muslims are also barred from proselytism with the exception of Muslims who obtained government approval to preach Islam. Local laws and government policies encourage the propagation of Islam among Muslims and non-Muslims alike and allow non-Muslims to worship only in private. Latter-day Saints at present can only operate in small groups of foreigners in private and no proselytism by foreigners is permitted. Humanitarian and development work sponsored by the LDS Church in the Maldives does not appear possible under current government restrictions.

Cultural Issues

Strong ethno-religious ties between Maldivian citizenry and Sunni Islam create a nearly insurmountable obstacle for Latter-day Saints and other Christians. There is no tolerance socially and politically for other religious groups to operate among natives or among foreigners publicly. Even if government restrictions on the practice of non-Muslim religions were relaxed, prospective Latter-day Saint mission outreach would face the challenge of creating proselytism approaches that are culturally sensitive to the needs and circumstance of a tight-knit, highly homogenous Muslim society.

National Outreach

Latter-day Saints perform no mission outreach in the Maldives. Any prospective mission outreach would occur under the direction of the India Bengaluru Mission. Malé offers the greatest opportunity for national outreach, as approximately a quarter of the national population resides on Malé, and many migrant workers live on the island. Logistical challenges presented by a nation of hundreds of islands that support a small population will likely render most of the inhabitants of the Maldives unreached by the Church for decades following any official Church establishment. There is no Divehi-language or Maldivian-directed LDS Internet outreach even though 76.5% of the population were Internet users as of 2017.[\[10\]](#)

Member Activity and Convert Retention

There have been no convert baptisms in the Maldives. Any Latter-day Saint foreigners who are active likely worship in the privacy of their homes.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Some challenges may occur integrating Maldivian and foreign Latter-day Saints into the same congregations due to language barriers and cultural differences.

Language Issues

There do not appear to be any Maldivian Latter-day Saints. The translation of at least one outreach resource in Divehi presents opportunity for the Church to disseminate literature among Divehi-speakers abroad and provides a proselytism resource if missionary outreach is permitted in the Maldives one day.

Missionary Service

No Maldivians have served a full-time mission. No LDS missionary work had occurred in the Maldives as of 2018.

Temple

The Maldives are assigned to the Hong Kong China Temple district.

Comparative Growth

The Maldives number among nations without a Church presence that at present are the least reachable by Latter-day Saints due to cultural and government restrictions, remote location, few if any foreign or indigenous members, and a small population. Challenges facing Latter-day Saints in Maldives compare to those of Comoros due to the strong ethno-religious link between nationality, ethnicity, and Islam. In 2018, Bhutan and North Korea were the only other Asian nations that appeared to have no LDS presence among foreigners or citizens.

Missionary-minded Christian groups report no presence in the Maldives. Any Christian activity is limited to foreigners or visitors practicing in private without the involvement of Maldivian citizens.

Future Prospects

There are no realistic hopes of an official or unofficial LDS Church establishment in the Maldives for the foreseeable future due to strict laws barring proselytism, the constitution's requirement for all Maldivian citizens be Muslim, the lack of Latter-day Saints, a small population, and distance from the nearest LDS mission outreach center. Increasing tourism, foreign investment, and the number of migrant workers from non-Muslim nations may help reduce government intolerance for non-Muslims over the long term.

[1] "Maldives," International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 16 July 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268936#wrapper>

[2] "Background Note: Maldives," Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 20 July 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5476.htm>

[3] "Background Note: Maldives," Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 20 July 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5476.htm>

[4] "Garudiya," Wikipedia.org, retrieved 21 December 2010. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuisine_of_the_Maldives

[5] "Issues," Transparency Maldives, 13 July 2008. <http://www.transparencymaldives.org/issues.html>

[6] "News," Transparency Maldives, Accessed 16 July 2018. <https://transparency.mv/category/news/>

[7] "Maldives," International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 17 July 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268936>

[8] "Maldives," International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 17 July 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268936>

[9] "Where We Work," LDS Charities. Accessed 17 July 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>

[10] "Internet Usage in Asia," Internet World Stats. Accessed 17 July 2018. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>